

## **DentaQuest Institute and BCBSNC Foundation Collaborate to Increase Access to Dental Care in North Carolina**

*First-of-its-kind program increases access to care and creates sustainability for Safety Net Dental Clinics*

**Dec. 11, 2009** – In tough economic times, safety net health providers experience dramatic growth in the number of individuals and families seeking services, including dental care. The DentaQuest Institute’s Safety Net Solutions (SNS) program has been successful in helping health centers prepare for and manage the demand for their services so they are better able to help more people in need of care. A recent grant from the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (BCBSNC) Foundation is bringing the SNS program into 10 North Carolina communities.

As a result of the \$187,750 grant, the DentaQuest Institute’s Safety Net Solutions program will be working with 10 dental clinics across North Carolina to both increase access to care for dental services and to enhance the financial sustainability of safety net dental practices. The sites include: Mission Hospital, Wake Health Services, Carolina Family Centers, Inc., Greene County Health Care, Inc., and Blue Ridge Regional Hospital, as well as clinics operated by Columbus County Health Dept., County of Durham, Dare County Dept. of Public Health, Guilford County Dept. of Public Health, and Wake County Government.

“There is a troubling disparity in the access to, and utilization of dental care in North Carolina,” said Kathy Higgins, president of the BCBSNC Foundation. “We are encouraged by this initiative and the opportunity to align the expertise of SNS with that of North Carolina’s safety net clinics, in-turn enhancing the sustainability and impact of our state’s dental safety net.”

“The BCBSNC Foundation is an important partner for Safety Net Solutions in supporting key health centers achieve their mission of helping their community,” said Dr. Mark Doherty, SNS program director. “In tough economic times, our nation’s network of safety net dental programs is more important than ever. SNS supports them with the mentoring of our faculty of national experts in community oral health program management. ”

The SNS program provides expert technical assistance to nonprofit dental programs across America. Working with the SNS team, the dental clinic staff evaluates current practices and creates business models that make them better able to meet demands for community-based oral health care and achieve financial sustainability.

The North Carolina clinics were chosen based on the demonstrated need for increased access to oral health care in the communities they serve; their commitment to participate in the evaluation process and share their experiences with other community safety net dental clinics; and their commitment to model improvement recommendations and practices.

The program has a track-record of success. Within one year of receiving technical assistance from SNS, individual dental care providers on average achieved:

- **An 11 percent increase in patient visits;**
- **An additional 709 patients per site;**
- **A 216 percent increase in bottom line performance; and**
- **A 20 percent increase in net revenue.**

The current U.S. population consists of more than 100 million people from low-income families, and according to the Journal of the American Dental Association, more than 72 percent of them are not seeing a dentist. This is coupled with the fact that as America's economic situation remains volatile, safety net dental practices across the country are struggling to provide quality care for the nation's most vulnerable people while maintaining sufficient financial performance to keep their practices open.

Founded in 2006, SNS has worked with more than 60 safety net dental programs in 14 states. This first-of-its-kind program provides both leadership and training tools that help the dental program create a balance between the safety net provider's mission to provide access to quality care for all and the business imperatives to preserve and grow services to reach more patients in need. This project is the first for SNS in North Carolina.

Throughout the process of working with SNS, clinics are guided by a faculty of national expert advisors who collectively represent decades of front-line experience in community health, business, dental program leadership and practice management expertise. With continued support from DentaQuest and outside funders, like BCBSNC Foundation and others, SNS aims to have a broad, national impact on the oral health safety net and improved access to quality publicly funded oral health care.

For more information, visit <http://dentaquestinstitute.org/safetynetsolutions>.

### **About DentaQuest**

DentaQuest is a leader in oral health supported by benefits, philanthropy and research. DentaQuest is one of the largest dental benefits providers in the nation, serving more than 12 million members through both commercial and government dental programs. DentaQuest provides high quality dental benefits programs, and is a partner in the community, committed to improving oral health through access, innovation and affordability.

### **About the DentaQuest Institute and Safety Net Solutions**

The DentaQuest Institute improves oral health by demonstrating higher quality approaches to preventing and managing oral disease and by providing technical assistance, through programs like Safety Net Solutions, that improve the efficiency and effectiveness of oral health care.

### **About the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation**

The BCBSNC Foundation is a separate, independent, nonprofit Foundation dedicated to improving the health and well-being of North Carolinians. The Foundation's focus areas include: Health of Vulnerable Populations - improving health outcomes of populations served by safety-net organizations; Healthy Active Communities - increasing physical activity and encouraging healthy eating habits; and Community Impact through Nonprofit Excellence - increasing the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations. Since its establishment in 2000, BCBSNC Foundation has invested more than \$58 million into the community through nearly 360 grants. More information is available at [www.bcbsncfoundation.org](http://www.bcbsncfoundation.org).

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